

Mar 1st, 2:45 PM

Direction to Water

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Pruis, Sarah, "Direction to Water" (2019). *Making Literature Conference*. 2.
<https://pillars.taylor.edu/makingliterature/2019conference/cw8/2>

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Grief

A whitetail deer lies whole
beside the road—whole,
except the heart casement.
Alive, except the ribs
picked bare.

Like an interactive diagram:
 What flesh lies
 behind this hide?
Lift the panel.
 What truth in bone
 beyond that?
Lift the panel.
 What death bellows
 beneath?
Lift your eyes to the disheveled

vultures, and let their shadows
smooth the burnt ache from
your cheekbones in reassurance
you too are whole, except.

In June

Ribbed basalt shears
the shrub steppe,
and sun glares off
the Columbia into
caves on cliff faces,
smothering the bleat
of big horned sheep.

Grazing darkness closely,
until every rock lies bleached,
the Sun welcomes Death.
She daily pulls him
from the shadows—
those damp branches
where pillbugs roil
in post-coital ecstasy.

Sister Chauffeur

The passenger-side visor broke
two weeks ago.

Driving into evening, I reach out
and scoop sunlight
from her eyes.

I feel the yellow sky pulse
in my palm.

As our hair winds together
and out the windows,

my arm aches to hold the sun
in place.

Dagger, lance, & lily

Dagger, lance, and lily;
Organ pipes splayed
as angel wings or a rib-
cage cracked like crab
shell—these are the
images of my religion.

I place them in my
grandmother's travel trunk
and collect bumper stickers
—offerings for scarred
panelling, wrinkled hands
open just like hers.

Driving While You Sleep

Rain swells over the windshield wipers, each tidal wave part
of a bead curtain that streaks the glass and blurs the night,
and I trace every rivulet to its end, floating up with each away
from the murky headlights and our loosely linked hands
that rest, limp, on your thigh. I drift free from my knot of veins,
woven like kelp, to the surface, where I touch the empty sky
for the first time since we met (when your gray eyes submerged me
like a prophecy, an end-time flood that sweeps mountains
and mingles orcas with the evergreens we're passing by).
Now the rain's dark patter echoes through space, overwhelming your sighs,
those siren exhalations that would anchor me beside you.
So my care floats, unmoored, on the surface of Love as I draw
my hand from yours to adjust the windshield wipers
so I can see the road.

Nightlight

As a child I was afraid
of Monsters in the dark.
As a woman I am afraid
of Men—both boast
that same burst-egg-yolk-
glow of teeth, which seeps
through the evening
onto my pillow.

I knew poetry by texting:

as every girl learns,
the cosmos depend
on placement of a period.

Is it too abrupt a way
to end a sentence?
Is the sentence too loose
without?
Am I?

Length, of course, is critical—never
to exceed two lines.

I liked prose a plenty, but
the boys preferred witticisms,
and even the geese

had greater tolerance
for my odes, graciously
contorting their proud necks
to accept (punctuated) flattery
of their unprecedented ability
to show up, if only once a year,

on time.

Neighbor

I.

A carton of eggs is strewn beside
stuttering traffic: one yolk smeared yellow
parallel to the fog line, nine safe in membrane,
shell, & divot, and two peering out from thin cracks
like watchers from the covered bus stop each November.

II.

The flour landed, presumably with a squelch,
on the other side of the guard rail in a boot print
path that schlups up to a dozen mismatched blues.

III.

One tarp shelter has a bonafide wooden door—
on hinges, in a frame, stoop stuck in the mud
—the type of door you'd knock on to ask
a neighbor for eggs.

IV.

The type of neighbor who accepts your city's
late night practice of a Symphony for Horns
without noise complaint, whom you never learn
the name of and know only
for the door between you.

Mother's Day, 2018
for Breton

Windows whistling,
we lurch along a backwoods
road, its shoulder grown over
in blackberry brambles.
Along telephone wires,
brass-breasted robins
are strung, and laundry
flops in the backseat.
We friends enter Spring
and Lynden simultaneously.

—There,
the two drooling cats
witness from a gray porch
as we climb moss-limbed
cherry trees and geese
patrol fallow fields.
Your mom's lilacs lean heavy
against the hayloft ladder.

You twirl me on
the barn swing, woven
by your great uncles, gleaming
like buttercups in a mote-
spiraled shaft of evening light.

Snap.

Coffee percolates
on iron stovetop, and I
watch on as you tell father, tell sister,
what happened to the rope.
This bloom, there is no one else
to receive apology.

Hiking Deception Pass

If I turn as a flower to the sun
and face the path behind me,
halting for a breath
that does not hiss—
If I let sweat roll down
the culvert of my spine
from under the blue band
of my sports bra, let it roll exposed
and glistening in the light,
luminous as the dew
dripping from leaf to leaf
above us—If I do so,

then you will see my red red face
or my white white back webbed
with stretch marks.
And I will feel the sun shine
on my skin and wind enter
my lungs, but I will also feel
ashamed.

Ashamed of the meadows
that are my unshaven legs
and the snowcapped slope
that is my stomach,
of the gasps that see me to the summit
and of my own bodied reminder
of the wild.

So I do not stop and turn
or pull the fabric from my flesh.
Because I, too, am a wilderness,
but not the type you're here to see.

Bridge Pose Anthem

This is an anthem for the fat women
in bridge pose in a yoga center
in Hyderabad—for the spiney pain
flooding their upper backs, incessant
as monsoon or the mewling of peacocks
and hotter than their sticky room
where every fan hangs silent because
“All yoga is hot yoga in the Deccan.”

This is an anthem for their sweat, decadent,
for the wealth of it, purling down the true arch
of their spines as they pulse forward
sparkling like Golconda diamonds.
An anthem for the women who wonder
if they wouldn't rather be fat than here
—fuck it—this is an anthem for *me*,
the *only* fat woman here.

For the way my rolls levitate like yogis,
are abducted by an alien gravity
that doesn't yet know fat women
aren't supposed to float.

For the six seconds left and the breath
coming steamy and jagged like boar
track on my orange-sand soccer field.

Three seconds.

A meditation on cake frosting.

One.

For the way I plunge into the muddy Ganga
beneath my bridge, the pose dissolving
in a viscous splash.

This is an anthem for my body and the fact
that it's still here.

Blood Orange

Light pollution unfurls
like an orange peel, discarded
on the horizon.

One segment stays stuck
to the wet-smoke sky—the moon
is half-empty, colored
in California flame,
and fires murmur
on either side of the asphalt.

Our interstate, though,
is doused in the security
of your asthmatic snores
as I glaze past every exit
and drive toward
the citrus promise
of a safer, blood orange dawn.

August

Droplets thrum across the mind's waxy leaves,
and bodies tangle like prayer candle smoke
rising from the orange-painted base
of a neem tree and catching
in the veined underside
of diamond sheafs and filtered light.

Branches tremble under monsoon rain,
and he above her does the same,
streams thick into this red-mud body
she calls her own.

They are dusted in fireflies and lightning's
violent, violet cry; while drowned in same waters,
they are mindless of the departing
menagerie, the ark.

Ghazal: Honeyed Lips

Come hear the magic of
trap door lips!
Enter the sworded space below
false-floor lips.

Hive whisperings swarm to
the new gal in town—
the heady summer buzz
of red allure lips.

Campfire-lit cigarettes and flesh-
eating monster stories
pass thru drunk girlfriends'
folklore lips.

Horrors abound about
a boy we know—
his Midwestern-storm-ey eyes
and his carnivore lips.

Penning is so permanent, tongue
left static in prose:
what calls it to lies, love,
and war? Lips.

When the bees are stingin' your heart,
Princess,
stop your crying, light a match, and hon-
ney your lips.